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ABSTRACT

A survey covered categories of budget, organization, staff resources, activities, and reporting techniques and policies; the survey revealed Research and Evaluation (R and E) offices received federal or state funding. Therefore, most retain financial independence from programs evaluated. The best placement of R and E offices in the school district's organizational chart appeared to be in a direct line relationship to the superintendent. Evaluators should be independent and their office should not be in the same branch as curriculum and instruction. The staff of most R and E offices is small and composed of members having various educational backgrounds and degrees. Two thirds have a relatively high ratio of support to resource staff. Many units also have access to computer facilities. R and E activities center around testing and outcome evaluation. Maintenance of information files and preparation of statistical reports were also significant activities of the staff. The most common data collection technique employed seemed to be tests and questionnaires, supplemented by other collection methods. R and E staff are sole determiners of report content or have ultimate authority over report contents. Several suggestions are offered for increasing evaluation use. (DWH)

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A STUDY OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION OFFICES AND OFFICE FUNCTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Within the past several years, many large school systems have established offices of research and evaluation in response to public demands for accountability. However, the internal organization of R & E offices, their placement within the overall administrative structure of the system, and the services they provide vary considerably from district to district. Some factors which may have contributed to this variability among the offices include (a) varied perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, (b) lack of well-defined goals and purposes, (c) political struggles for the control of information, (d) limited awareness of existing effective public school evaluation units, and (e) the reactive development of R & E offices in response to federal and local demands.

The objective of this study was to examine, via distribution of a questionnaire, the current status of R & E offices in medium and large city public school systems and to describe the organizational models used to provide evaluation services. Kean (1980) highlights the importance of this type of investigative study in resolving conflicting demands made upon internal offices of research and evaluation. The present research activity was motivated by a task assigned to administrators in Charleston County, that of reorganizing the administrative levels of the school district. It was intended that a major outcome of the study would be information to assist them in making decisions about (a) the appropriate placement of R & E within the system, (b) the relationship of R & E to other segments of the system (e.g., curriculum, data processing, pupil accounting, etc.), (c) the internal organization of R & E, (d) the relationship of job assignment to funding source, (e) the types of activities R & E should engage in, and (f) budget allocations. Other areas which are troublesome and of particular concern to R & E staff were also studied. These included: the extent to which districts contract for external evaluations; clerical and other support services available within the R & E office and those provided by other district offices; reporting techniques and dissemination policies and

the control over various aspects of reporting; and the types of "research" activities in which R & E staff engage.

Method

The Questionnaire

The "Public Schools Research and Evaluation Organizational Survey" is an eight-page questionnaire with items covering the following five categories: budget; organization; staff resources; activities; and reporting techniques and policies. A final question concerned the future of R & E operations. Of the approximately 30 items, nearly all were open-ended and required the respondent to enter specific information or describe situations or perceptions. Although the open-ended format was not conducive to easy analysis, the nature of the information sought could not be obtained in any other manner. The questionnaire also asked respondents to forward copies of organizational charts.

Survey Procedures and Sample

The questionnaire was distributed to 200 directors of R & E units in November, 1981. Names of directors were obtained from one of two lists: Directors of Research and Evaluation from Selected Large City School Districts in the United States and Canada and the mailing list of the National Association of Test Directors. After a second mailing to non-respondents, a total of 58 questionnaires were returned. Considering the length and format of the survey, a low response rate (29%) was expected.

The first page of the questionnaire was a cover sheet on which respondents were requested to enter their name, job title, and school district. This page was removed before analysis of responses in order to maintain anonymity of the school districts and the confidentiality of responses which were attitudinal or evaluative in nature.

District size. Forty-six respondents reported student enrollment for their districts. School district size ranged from 17,000 to 210,000 with a median

between 40,000 and 50,000.

Data Analysis

For each item on the survey, percentages of respondents selecting each response alternative or entering specific pieces of information were calculated. The analyses of closed-format items included the percentage of non-respondents. Responses to open-ended items were clustered according to similarity of response, and percentages were calculated in terms of persons responding to that item.

Results

R & E Budgets

Thirty-seven or 80% of the respondents indicated that they received less than one per cent of the total school district FY82 budget for their offices' activities. Four respondents received 1 - 1.9 per cent of the local budget and two received 2 - 2.9 per cent. Three respondents reported that their budget does not include any funds from the local school district. Table 1 shows the relationsip between school district size and per cent of local budgets allocated to R & E.

Most R & E units supplement their budget with monies received from external sources. Seventy per cent of the respondents receive some federal grant money as part of their R & E budget, 41% receive some state funds, and 20% receive money from other sources (e.g., sale of services, contracts, grants). A few R & E units (20%) rely heavily on outside funding, reporting that 50% or more of their budget comes from non-local funds; one-third of these units reported that all their non-local funds were received from the federal government.

Management of federal and state funds. There appears to be some variation in the manner in which monies from federal or state grants used for evaluation efforts are handled, but a clear picture emerges for two-thirds of the respondents. For most R & E units, a set percentage of the total grant is rarely earmarked automatically for evaluation purposes. Money allocated for the evaluation of a funded program is transferred to the R & E budget with

dollars earmarked for specific expenditures (e.g., personnel, materials, computer costs). Table 2 contains the results of responses to questionnaire items addressing this issue.

When asked to identify areas of dissatisfaction with the organization of R & E, one respondent stated that evaluation of federally funded programs could be carried out more efficiently if R & E were allowed to assign skills to the task. Currently, in this particular office a person is assigned to carry out the entire evaluation and can work only on tasks related to the federally funded program.

Summary. The majority of the participating R & E offices receive the greater part of their budgets from the local school district, confirming data gathered four years earlier by Lyon et al. (1978). However, in almost all cases, regardless of school district size, the financial committment to evaluation and research efforts is low on the part of school boards, as reflected in the per cent of local funds allocated to R & E offices. At the time of the Lyon study, Webster and Stufflebeam (1978) found that the R & E departments of 35 large urban school districts received .15% of their districts' total educational budget. While 49% of our sample had FY82 budgets greater than .15% of their district's budget (implying a tendency toward greater committment), the purposes for which additional monies were allocated are unknown. For example, the "committment" might be toward mandated testing programs. In any case, R & E offices depend upon outside funding to supplement their budgets. When federal or state monies are received by the district, it is most common for the portion of the grant allocated to evaluation costs to be transferred to the R & E budget with the expenditure of funds specified. Thus, it appears that two-thirds of the evaluation units retain financial independence from programs evaluated within the boundaries of predetermined areas of expenditure.

Organization

The survey was designed to ascertain the organizational placement of R & E offices within school districts, the relationship between R & E offices and other branches of school districts, and the degree of satisfaction R & E directors felt with their place in the system. Fifty-seven respondents provided usable data for this section.

Organizational charts. An analysis of organizational charts and responses to survey items reveals that 86% of the responding offices are separated organizationally from the branches responsible for curriculum (i.e., content area coordinators, program managers), and 91% are totally separate from instruction (i.e., area superintendents, principals, teachers). In only one case is R & E subsumed by a branch responsible for curricula and, in that case, the branch is titled "Instructional Development." Compared to the figure of 62% found by Lyon et al. (1978) for the percentage of R & E units not located in the instructional line, there appears to be a trend toward greater independence from instructional staff. Survey results also indicated that R & E and Curriculum/Instruction are at the same level organizationally in 64% of the cases providing usable data.

To whom does the R & E director report? Eighteen (32%) report directly to the superintendent, 31 (54%) report to someone one level below the superintendent, and eight (14%) report to someone two levels below the superintendent. Lyon and her colleagues also found that most R & E units report to the superintendent through indirect channels.

Director satisfaction and dissatisfaction were elicited by an open-ended item: "In what ways are you satisfied and/or dissatisfied with the internal organization of your office and its placement within the district administration?" Two issues mentioned frequently in response to this item were (a) separation from the branches of the district responsible for implementing programs and (b) proximity to the superintendent within the organizational structure. Ten

respondents reported they were satisfied because of their separation from program personnel, and one expressed dissatisfaction with an organization that placed R & E in the same branch of the district with programs evaluated. Four respondents specifically indicated they were satisfied because they report directly to the superintendent, and four expressed dissatisfaction because they do not. In addition, eight respondents who expressed satisfaction with their organizational placement without specifying their reasons report directly to the superintendent or a deputy superintendent and are separate from divisions of curriculum and instruction. Seven respondents stated that their relationships with other branches of the district were good, but one said that due to separation from program personnel, it was necessary to "earn our way" with them.

Perceptions of R & E. Respondents were asked "How do you believe most district personnel view the role of your office and evaluation activities?" Nineteen (33%) reported that their offices are viewed as a helpful, supportive resource, seven (12%) stated they were viewed positively by some district personnel and apprehensively or as a nuisance by others, eight (4%) felt that they are seen as credible providers of factual information, seven (12%) believed that they are perceived primarily as involved with testing and test interpretation, three (5%) believe they are seen as threatening, three felt activities are not generally understood, and three felt they are seen as a necessary evil or burden.

Office titles. The "official" titles of R & E units provide clues to the districts' perceptions of the purposes of these offices which only in some cases coincide with actual work performed. (See Activities section.) Overall, six different descriptors are used in the majority of office titles. These descriptors and the percentages of R & E units having that descriptor in its title are as follows: Evaluation/Program Evaluation/Program Assessment (67%); Research (51%); Planning (17%); Testing (16%); Development (6%); Counseling/Guidance/Psychological Services (5%); and Accountability (3%). Descriptors included in

only one title are: Accreditation; Statistics; Data Processing; Elementary Curriculum; Student Information Services; Pupil Assessment; and Public Relations/Negotiations.

Services rendered or purchased. Seventy-nine percent (45) of the respondents receive computer and data processing services from within the school district. Although data processing capabilities are critical to evaluation and research efforts (playing a vital role in test scoring, data analysis, etc.), only nine respondents (16%) reported that they are located in the same branch of the school district and have the same supervisor as the office of data processing. In most cases, computer facilities are located in the business or information management branch of the district, and two respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the business orientation of data processing personnel in their districts. There was also dissatisfaction expressed by one respondent who noted that a variety of offices in different branches of the district collect overlapping data (e.g., attendance, maintenance, disciplinary action, etc.) and that the collection and analysis of these data were not coordinated.

Some services are purchased from outside the district. Thirty per cent responded that they "frequently" purchase test scoring services from external vendors, and 32% "sometimes" purchase such services, confirming the high percentage of testing units with inside scoring support found by Wilkens (1981). Other services with R & E offices purchase outside the district include consulting (9%-frequently; 28%-sometimes); printing (11%-frequently; 5%-sometimes); keypunching (9%-frequently; 7%-sometimes); test construction (4%-frequently; 2%-sometimes); and test reports (7%-frequently).

Evaluation services. In 28 cases (52%), district offices purchase evaluation servcies from agencies outside the school district. In 16 of these districts, outside services are purchased by grant recipients who need an impartial,

third-party evaluation. One respondent said that R & E advises district offices to seek an external evaluation for one-time evaluation services, and another reports that R & E requests an outside evaluation when a particularly sensitive issue is being studied. Other evaluations which had been contracted out included evaluations of magnet and middle schools, organization and office management, inservices and a community opinion survey.

In most of the districts responding (71%), the office which answered the survey was the only district office providing evaluation or research services. In the remaining 17 districts, separate evaluation or research studies were conducted by offices of federal or state programs (8), special education (2), research (2), vocational education (1), Indian education (1), gifted program (1), student personnel (1), monitoring (1), placement and special projects (1), systems management (1), and special services (1).

Summary. The most satisfactory placement of R & E within a school district's organizational structure appears to be characterized by (a) separate branches responsible for implementation of programs and evaluation of programs and (b) direct communication between R & E and the superintendent or deputy superintendent. Regarding services received or purchased by R & E, R & E relies heavily on computer facilities owned and operated by the district's data processing unit (usually located in a different administrative branch). In addition, R & E purchases some test scoring services from outside vendors, and some units purchase a variety of minor services, such as keypunching and printing. Although most large scale evaluations are internal evaluations, approximately half of the R & E offices occasionally purchase external evaluation services. In 29% of the districts, offices of federal or state programs conduct separate evaluation studies of special projects.

Most directors of R & E units believe their offices are viewed positively by users and providers of evaluation data. Yet, 16% commented on negative perceptions held of their office, while 12% stated that they were viewed

positively by some and negatively by others.

Resources

Professional staff. Respondents were asked to provide data on R & E staff. Data included the number of staff members, the highest academic degree held by each, the degree field, and the funding source for their salaries.

The number of staff members ranged from 1 to 52, with a median of 5 and mean of 8. Thus, the distribution of professional staff is skewed such that most R & E units have smaller size staffs, while a few districts have very large staffs. In fact, four districts had staff sizes ranging from 20 to 33, while two units reported a total of 52 professional staff members.

Degrees of 435 professionals described in the returned questionnaires ranged from Ph. D. to high school diploma, with professional degrees in a variety of areas. The following data were gathered on the percentage of professionals having different type degrees: Ph.D. (28%); Ed.D. (14%); Masters (41%); Bachelors (14%); and high school diploma (3%). Degree fields were provided for 219 professionals and are reported below as percentages:

Percentages	Degree Field
24.5	Education
11.6	Educational research; evaluation; tests and measurement
10.0	Educational administration
8.4	Mathematics
7.2	Educational psychology; school psychology
6.8	Psychology
6.0	Educational specialties (e.g., chemistry, music)
5.6	Counseling; guidance
5.2	Reading; English; language arts
4.4	Other fields (e.g., social work; economics; philosophy, theater)
3.2	Elementary education

Percentages	Degree Field
2.8	Curriculum and instruction
2.4	Special education
1.6	Statistics
1.6	Business
0.8	Child development
0.8	Communications

The educational background of R & E professional staff varies considerably, cutting across all fields of education and spilling over into psychology and non-related areas. Some staff members are evaluating programs in areas directly related to their degree field. Yet, only a small percentage of professional staff matriculated in graduate programs of educational research, evaluation, tests and measurement, or statistics.

Funding source. As of this fiscal year, 30% of the professional staff received salaries from non-local sources (i.e., federal or state). Below is a table showing the distribution of R & E units with varying percentages of staff funded with federal or state monies:

% of R & E Staff Supported with Non-Local Funds	Percentage of R & E Units	Cumulative Percentage of R & E Units
91 - 100	4	4
81 - 90	4	8
71 - 80	4	12
61 - 70	4	16
51 - 60	0	16
41 - 50	20	36
31 - 40	8	44
21 - 30	4	48
11 - 20	10	58
1 - 10	6	64
0	37	101

Although 43% of the R & E units have no or up to 10% of their staffs salaried with outside funds, a significant percentage (36%) have more than 40% of their staff supported by federal or state funds.

Support staff resources. The questionnaire requested a description of the support staff resources available to the professional R & E staff. Of the 48 R & E units responding to this question, 60% had clerical (i.e., secretarial) help only. Many of these units, however, also had money budgeted for temporary help and/or had technical support availabe to them from other departments (e.g., keypunching from data processing). The remaining 40% employed technical staff (e.g., programmers, data technicians, research assistants, testing aides) in addition to clerical staff.

The ratio of support staff to professional staff ranged from .26 to 2.00 for the 39 R & E units giving the exact number of employees in their unit. Approximately 23% had proportionally more support staff than professional staff; 44% had a ratio ranging from .75 to 1.00, while 33% had less than a .75 ratio (less than three resource staff to every four professionals).

One area of dissatisfaction expressed by questionnaire respondents was the quantity and quality of R & E staff members. Six respondents indicated that they were either understaffed, or that some of their staff members were not appropriately trained. One respondents specifically mentioned a hiring freeze which had resulted in a loss of personnel in the R & E office, and one mentioned a need for a larger support staff.

Computer facilities. Nearly all (93%) of the R & E offices have access to computer facilities. Of the 51 offices using computers, 79% use the district's mainframe, and 35% have telecommunications terminals which "hook up" with the district's mainframe. Only 16% purchase CPU time from local universities as the only source of computers or to supplement their use of the district's computer. Additionally, 10% either own or lease a minicomputer or a larger computer, while 10% use a government-owned computer (e.g., county or state government). Other

equipment owned by 25% of the R & E units includes word processors, mark sense card readers, optical scanners, and high speed printers.

Summary. The majority of R & E offices have a relatively small staff composed to members having various educational backgrounds and degrees. Forty-two percent have doctorate degrees; 41% have masters degrees. Non-local monies provide salaries for one-third of these professionals. Two-thirds of the R & E units have a relatively high ratio of support to resource staff. While 60% have clerical help only, 40% employ other support staff, such as programmers and research assistants. A majority of R & E units also have access to computer facilities, in most cases owned by the school district; a few also rely on computers owned by local universities.

Activities

The survey listed 18 descriptors of activities performed by R & E units, with space provided for additional activities. The percentage of R & E units involved in each of the 18 activities is listed in Table 3.

R & E units provide a median of 14 different types of services to their school districts, with more than half of the units involved in 16 of the 18 activities listed on the questionnaire. Most common to R & E units is administration of norm-referenced tests and preparation of test reports. Implementation of criterion-referenced testing programs is the responsibility of over 80% of the R & E units. Responses to an item concerning minimal competency testing programs indicate that the R & E role in testing has expanded to include MCT programs, with 84% of the R & E units involved in various components of these programs, from test development to scoring and reporting.

R & E is also heavily involved in a variety of program evaluation activities. Nearly all R & E units evaluating educational programs are at the front end of program development via needs assessment and proposal writing. Process and outcome evaluation are common activities.

Due to R & E involvement in massive data collection efforts (e.g., test scores, evaluation data), it is not surprising that 82% of the units spend time managing the storage, retrieval, and update of data. Ten of the 55 districts added two activities to our list: (a) maintaining data files which are not directly related to testing, research or program evaluation activities (e.g., student demographic data, although surely this type of data could be used for such purposes) and (b) preparing various administrative reports summarizing district data (e.g., Office of Civil Rights reports).

Other activities in which over half the R & E units are involved are provision of training/inservices (82%) and selection of students for special programs (55%). Lesser activities were meta evaluation (27%) and personnel evaluation (24%). Other R & E offices (11%) added that they are directly involved in the utilization of their evaluation findings through active participation in administrative planning and development of system goals and objectives.

The survey also requested that the respondent enter the percentage of time allocated to each of the activities listed. The activities with the highest allocated time, in order, were outcome evaluation, evaluation design/planning, norm-referenced test administration, and research.

Research. Although most R & E units checked "research" as an activity conducted by their staff, answers to a question about research activities gave a different picture of the nature of their research activities, as distinct from evaluation, and the extent to which research was actually a priority function of R & E. All but three respondents perceived a fairly clear distinction between research and evaluation activities. Unfortunately, just over 50% of the units stated that they presently do not conduct "real" or "basic" research investigations which "go beyond the scope of program evaluation." Most of these units facilitate the research efforts of outsiders, however. The remaining districts emphasize one or both of two types of research activities: (a) research which

relates closely to program evaluation (e.g., comparison of secondary reading programs; sustained effects of Title I programs; Title I pull-out vs. in-class scheduling) and (b) research designed to help shed light on administrative dilemmas. Examples of this latter type of research include: the four-day educational work week; effects of multi-grade or combination classes; classroom grouping practices; staff absenteeism; factors of effective schooling; student absenteeism; the sociometric impact of desegregation; longitudinal studies of student achievement; the predictive validity of locally developed screening instruments; student, parent, and teacher attitude research; class size.

Services to outsiders. A final question in this section inquired about services provided to outsiders for a fee (such as test scoring or consulting). Of the 51 units responding negatively to this item, three are currently considering this type of activity. Four R & E units offering their services for a fee are doing the following: analyzing proficiency data for their state department of education; selling a license to use their tests and scoring test results; providing data to external researchers; and receiving reimbursement for evaluators' time and services.

Summary. Overall, R & E activities center mostly around testing and outcome evaluation. This should not come as a surprise, as Lyon et al. (1978) had uncovered the dominance of student achievement data in the data collection efforts of evaluation units. With R & E units responsible for all state- and district-mandated NRT and CRT programs (see Wilkens, 1981), this time-consuming activity limits the amount of time spent on other data collection efforts, such as process evaluation and research activities.

Five respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their districts' emphases for R & E activities. Specifically mentioned was a need for greater emphasis on planning, local research and evaluation, evaluation of organizational

effectiveness, and more research and evaluation (as opposed to evaluation and testing).

Many offices are involved in other activities, such as training; some engage in research designed to answer administrative questions and participate in administrative decision-making. The data collection burden placed upon R & E units has demanded that R & E staff create and maintain "computerized" student data files. One outcome of data management is the education of R & E staff in computer usage and file organization, and their subsequent movement into the realm of data processing. As a result, nearly one out of five units returning the survey added that maintenance of information files and preparation of statistical reports were significant activities of their staff.

Evaluation Models, Techniques and Reports

Models. Thirty-seven respondents (68%) reported that they use a model or variety of models which are generally recognized evaluation models (CIPP: 11; Tylerian: 1; Discrepancy: 3; Service Delivery Assessment: 1; Center for the Study of Evaluation Model: 1; Hammond-EPIC: 1; locally developed models based on known models: 4;. Fifteen (27%) responded that they do not use any particular model, and seven (13%) use an eclectic approach to evaluation design. Ten (18%) responded with a statistical analysis technique or research design rather than an evaluation model. Such responses included Title I models A, B and C (i.e., norm-referenced, experimental, and regression analysis).

Evaluation techniques. A wide variety of techniques are employed in R & E offices, the most widely used being tests (90%), interviews (64%), survey and/or questionnaires (95%), classroom observation (39%), checklists (47%), and district records (9%). Outcome measures (other than test scores) which are frequently used include attendance rates (30%), dropout rates (13%), discipline referrals (18%), attitude scales (25%), self-concept measures (18%), suspension rates (9%),

time-on-task (4%), behavior rating scales (2%), mobility rates (9%), teacher absenteeism (4%), instructional expenditures (4%), classroom grades (4%), vandalism rates (4%), school climate measures (2%), accident rates (2%), and library circulation records (2%). Eighty-seven per cent of the respondents reported using three or more different evaluation techniques.

Reporting. The most frequently used report formats were oral presentations (66%) and written reports (73%). Eight respondents said that their written reports generally include modified summary reports or executive summaries. Other report formats include slide and video presentations, press releases, computer printouts, workshops and inservice training, and test result pamphlets for parents

A study was also made of the extent to which persons from other district offices influence and/or control various aspects of the reporting process. Respondents were asked to indicate who is involved and who has ultimate authority over four facets of reporting evaluation and research results: report contents, format, dissemination schedule and recipients. Thirty reported that only members of the R & E staff are involved in determining report contents, while 26 responded that both R & E staff members and persons from other offices were involved, including program personnel or clients (16) and administrators (9). Ultimate authority over report contents is held by R & E staff members alone in 36 cases (64%), but in 15 cases (27%) a superior administrator has final authority over report contents. In 38 districts, the same people who are involved in and have ultimate authority over report contents also control format and dissemination. Among the eighteen districts where different report activities involve different people, the client is more involved in decisions involving the dissemination of the report, both the schedule for dissemination (5) and the recipients (7). In three cases the client has ultimate authority regarding the dissemination schedule, and in one case, also controls the specification of recipients. However, in six

cases, high-level district administrators assume sole authority over dissemination schedules and specification of recipients.

Use of R & E results. Forty-five (80%) of the respondents reported that evaluation and research results were used by district personnel to make decisions. Decisions cited as examples of use of R & E results included curriculum revision (9), program modification, initiation, or continuation (21), provision of inservices (6), district goals and priorities (11), budget allocations(6), student placement and scheduling (8), instructional strategy modifications (6), personnel policies, placement, or employment (6), improved support and administrative services (4), and building utilization or school consolidation (3).

Summary. R & E units approach evaluation design from a variety of perspectives, using recognized evaluation models, statistical techniques, and selected designs (their own or others) best fitting a particular program. Tests and questionnaires appear to be the most common data collection technique employed, supplemented by other collection methods.

In just over half the R & E units, R & E staff are the sole determiners of report contents, and in two-thirds, they have ultimate authority over report contents, format and/or dissemination. In the 18 districts where clients are more influential in some aspects of reporting over others, report dissemination (scheduling and recipients) is the area in which they are most involved.

Survey respondents gave several examples in which evaluation results were used to make programmatic or administrative changes. Although 80% of the respondents confirmed the use of evaluation results by decision-makers, it was not clear whether use was immediate and instrumental or gradual and conceptual. (See King et a., 1981, for an excellent discussion of this distinction.) The important point, however, is that results were perceived as used for decision-making.

A Final Question

The last item on the questionnaire inquired about major problems and challenges which R & E offices will have to face in the future. (Results are summarized in Table 4.) With demands for educational accountability placed upon states and local school districts across the country, coupled with the current state of financial affairs, R & E departments face a similar, yet very uncertain and challenging, future. On one hand, R & E units will be losing much financial support along with other district departments. Nearly half the respondents expressed concern over the financial future of R & E. Federal funds which provide revenue for program evaluation activities in 70% of the R & E units are drying up at the same time that local school boards are following the nationwide trend of reducing government spending. On the other hand, R & E is the most critical unit for ensuring accountability at the local level and for providing objective data on which to base administrative decisions. With involvement in large-scale testing programs and provision of data for administrative decision-making (e.g., in which areas whould the budget be reduced?), the demands for R & E services are increasing. Yet, fifteen respondents commented on the heavy work loads and insufficient resources (e.g., staff, computer facilities) needed to maintain existing operations.

An additional dilemma which school districts face is the characteristic nature of R & E operations. While only a few respondents (3) mentioned a continuing need to "sell" R & E services and the utility of its data for decision-making, four other respondents observed that R & E provides "indirect" services and, therefore, is viewed as more expendable than other central office departments which are relatively linked more directly to daily classroom instruction.

Most respondents observed that the future will necessitate greater operational efficiency to meet current and future demands in light of financial trauma

and to ensure that evaluation data will be used for decision-making. Most often cited was a need for management information systems, that is, computerized data-bases to store and maintain the wealth of student data such that data are easily retrieved and updated. Also needed to meet a future of "doing more with less" according to five respondents, is a review of current R & E operations, with the objective of delineating priorities, policies, and procedures for R & E activities so that R & E units can develop better data collection techniques and collect usable evaluation data responsive to system needs.

Discussion

The rather naive attempt of this investigation into the world of school district Research and Evaluation offices was to find nationwide "evidence" to answer "should" questions, such as: where should R & E be placed in the administrative structure?; what should be the relationship of R & E to other district offices?; what percentage of a school district's budget should be allocated to R & E services? Questionnaire responses could then be used as ammunition for personal feelings concerning answers to these questions. Instead of finding support, data analysis clarified a few dilemmas which R & E offices must soon confront.

One dilemma concerns the placement of Research and Evaluation offices in the school district's organizational chart. The Joint Committee's Standards (1981), as well as professionals in the field (e.g., Rossi, Freeman, & Wright, 1979), agree that evaluators should be as independent as possible from programs they are evaluating, and that they should be directly responsible to agency heads. This arrangement was the one advocated by our questionnaire respondents. Thus, the most appropriate placement for R & E appears to be location in a branch different from curriculum and instruction, with a direct line relationship to the superintendent or his/her deputy.

There are several advantages and dissadvantages to this arrangement. One advantage is that the distance keeps evaluators fair and unbiased by limiting

the influence other agency staff might have on them. The probability of conflicting interests is thereby reduced; misuse of information for political purposes is minimized; and accurate findings are disseminated to all right-to-know audiences. Such heighened credibility, along with technically sound methodology and effective communication and reporting skills, should encourage use of evaluation data for modifying program components. Yet, the organizational distance of R & E from instruction may also increase the potential for non-use, as pointed out by King, Thompson, & Pechman (1981). Their review of research on evaluation use suggests that collaboration and periodic verbal communication between evaluator and decision-maker, if practical, are likely to improve the application of evaluation data by bringing trust and a personal touch to the evaluation effort. A forced separation of evaluation from instruction could be a disadvantage in that it discourages collaboration, nutures negative perceptions and misperceptions of the evaluation service and staff (so that evaluators have to "earn their way" with clients), and creates a tendency for evaluators to be less involved in program improvement discussion and action. It is often the case that evaluators, highly trained in evaluation design and statistical applications, are perceived as not having the knowledge or background necessary for suggesting specific courses of improvement. Such perceptions can be altered as a result of periodic interaction between evaluator and client. Standard B7 states that "evaluators must not assume that improvements will occur automatically once the evaluation report is completed," and that "evaluators . . . should play the role of change agent." Thus the dilemma: how can R & E staff play this role and stimulate and guide program improvement while maintaining their organizational distance from the instructional branch?

The inevitable financial situation contributes to this dilemma while creating others. The majority of R & E offices, like other district offices, will be affected to some degree by federal cutbacks and similar local action, and

approximately one of every five will be affected severely. Many questionnaire respondents stated that they will be expected to meet existing demands with next year's limited resources. An obvious consequence is that financial limitations will increase the probability that evaluation information will not be used. Fewer staff and resources could result in less timely and usable information (a current concern of R & E personnel), and, in general, could reduce the amount of time and effort put into actions which serve to maximize use.

Another issue affected by reduced budget allocations concerns the types of activities in which R & E professionals engage. There is indeed a need to determine priorities for R & E and to restate the purposes of R & E operations in light of the recent financial situation; and it may come to pass that whatever strides we have made in the direction of describing instructional processes and relating them to program outcome (using evaluation models such as CIPP) will be jeopardized. For example, the testing trend has been to supplement norm-referenced testing programs with minimal competency or basic skills testing programs, thereby doubling the work load of R & E units with regard to group achievement testing. Of course, mandated policies must be first priority. With fewer resources available, additional mandated testing programs to administer, and greater data processing responsibilities, it is likely that evaluation will be reduced to simplified levels of evaluation design (i.e., outcome studies using norm-referenced or criterion-referenced student achievement data) and will yield little information for identifying why or how such outcomes were produced. If R & E doesn't win the battle of "proving" the value of their services for high-level decision-making, it is possible that R & E will be gradually transposed into an educational data center, divorced from instruction and curriculum evaluation.

Another dilemma which R & E offices presently faces and will continue to face puts them in a Catch-22 situation. With budget trimming, R & E can provide

an essential service in determining policy changes which are related to the financial crunch. Unfortunately, many R & E units report that due to a heavy work load, the type of research their school district needs is low priority. In addition, working against R & E are three disabilities. One is the occasional inability of R & E offices to respond to immediate and unanticipated demands. Often, "ad hoc" data which effectively respond to a particular concern cannot be generated. A second disability already mentioned is budget reduction. And third is the apparent indirect connection between R & E and classroom instruction. For these reasons, R & E is often perceived as expendable by local school boards. Thus, many R & E offices have not been given the opportunity to display their potential, and with fewer resources, this possibility is reduced even further. In contrast, other offices have been involved in data collection efforts designed to shed light on important controversial issues. Given resources and cooperation, all R & E offices can provide the type of data upon which administrative policy can be based. But, such efforts, to be worthwhile, require money and long-range planning.

Alternative Organizational Arrangements

The situation looks grim for the many R & E offices hit hard by financial cutbacks, especially those still trying to convince decision-makers of the value and potential of their services. We can't offer tips for changing attitudes, but recommendations can be made for factors evaluators can control. King et al. (1981), for example, offer several suggestions for increasing evaluation use, such as improving the quality of the evaluation study and report. Additionally, organizational channels can be improved to address some of the dilemmas described earlier.

A team approach. In most R & E offices, a program to be evaluated is assigned to a single evaluator located in an administrative branch other than instruction, who then becomes responsible for developing the evaluation design,

collecting and analyzing data, and preparing the evaluation report. Problems can be created by this practice. For example, organizationally independent evaluators collecting outcome data may not be perceived as "on the side" of the program and program manager. This increases resistance to the collection of process data and active evaluator participation in program improvement efforts. In the minds of program staff, collection of process data becomes associated with the collection of outcome data and with summative decisions on the continuation of programs. These perceptions may result in resistance to the collection and use of process data. Another problem which tends to limit the use of formative evaluations is the extent to which program managers feel that evaluators, not well-versed in the "content area," cannot recommend specific changes for improving educational programs. A team approach whereby a group is assigned to evaluate a program and R & E staff members are assigned to different evaluation tasks according to skills, interest, or personality could alleviate biases against evaluators. Survey results revealed that R & E staff members come from a variety of educational backgrounds. The staff member with background or experience in the particular area addressed by a program can be assigned the collection of process data, while a staff member more familiar with outcome measures can be assigned outcome evaluation responsibilities. Such teams would have two advantages. First, the collection of process data by a person who is not associated with collecting product data could improve relationships between the process evaluator and his/her client and create perceptions of a supportive evaluator. The process evaluator could be assigned the task of interpreting outcome data in terms of process information without posing a threat, while maintaining the objectivity of an outsider. Second, process evaluator's program relevant knowledge and background would enhance the credibility of his or her suggestions for program improvement.

Planning. Only 23% of the R & E offices had "Planning" or "Development" in their office titles, while 11% reported involvement in administrative and

long-range planning activities. Perhaps planning (i.e., using evaluation data) should be formally stated as a critical R & E function. Long-range planning activities would also help keep R & E at the front end of administrative research tasks. School boards need to be aware of the need for long-range instructional planning so that districts can anticipate financial loss and prepare for the future.

Educational data center. The testing burden of R & E has grown faster than the number of staff members needed to do the job. Little time is left to collect other relevant evaluation data, while more time is spent on data processing tasks. If testing, scoring, and reporting were delegated to another department, such as an educational data center located in the same branch as R & E and data processing, R & E staff would be freed to gather critical input and process evaluation data and to conduct research to answer administrative questions.

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Table 1

Number of R & E Units Categorized by

School District Size and Per Cent of Local Budget

Allocated to R & E (N=58)

School District Size	Per Cent of Local Budget Allocated to R & E Office				
	No Response	0%	Less than 1%	1-1.9%	2-2.9%
No Response	4		6	1	1
Under 20,000	1	2			
20,100 - 30,000	3	1	1	1	1
30,100 - 40,000			8	1	
40,100 - 50,000		1	8		
50,100 - 60,000			2		
60,100 - 70,000			2	1	
70,100 - 80,000			4		
80,100 - 100,000			4		
100,100 - 200,000	1	1	2		
Greater than 200,000			1		
Total	9	5	38	4	2

Table 2

Management of Federal and State Funds:

"When funds for evaluation are received as part of a federal or state grant . . ."

Item	Number and Percentage of Respondents (N=50)				
	Almost Always	Usually	Some-times	Almost Never	Response
A set percentage of the total grant is auto-matically earmarked for evaluation costs.	4 (8%)	10 (20%)	16 (32%)	15 (30%)	5 (10%)
Program managers negotiate with R & E staff to purchase evaluation services.	6 (12%)	11 (22%)	13 (26%)	16 (32%)	4 (8%)
Evaluation dollars are kept within the program budget and are not transferred to the R & E office.	10 (20%)	6 (12%)	11 (22%)	17 (34%)	6 (12%)
Once funds are transferred to the R & E budget, they may be spent as R & E sees fit.	9 (18%)	7 (14%)	7 (14%)	21 (42%)	6 (12%)
Evaluation budgets have funds earmarked for specific expenditures (e.g., person-nel, materials, computer charges, etc.).	24 (48%)	10 (20%)	4 (8%)	11 (22%)	1 (2%)

Table 3

Per Cent of R & E Units Involved in Various Activities (N=55)

Per Cent of R & E Units	Activity
100	Preparation of norm-referenced test reports
98	Norm-referenced test administration
93	Outcome evaluation
91	Development of tests and other instruments
91	Needs assessment
87	Research
85	Evaluation design/planning
84	Process evaluation
84	Preparation of criterion-referenced test reports
82	Provision of training/inservices
82	Data management (i.e., maintenance of student data files)
80	Criterion-referenced test administration
71	Norm-referenced test scoring
65	Proposal writing
56	Criterion-referenced test scoring
55	Selection of students for special programs
27	Meta evaluation
24	Personnel evaluation
	Other:
18	Maintenance of information files (e.g., attendance, student demographic data); preparation of statistical reports (e.g., annual reports, OCR reports, personnel reports, projection reports)
11	Administrative planning; financial planning; development of system goals and objectives
9	Technical assistance; delivery of consultant services to schools
5	Supervision of institutional (external) research
4	Management (i.e., Title I comparability; district's MBO system)
2	Curriculum development

Table 4

Number of Respondents Citing

Major Problems or Challenges for the Future

Number of Comments	Comments
	Financial Problems:
24	Shrinking budget and funding; difficulty surviving budget cuts
	Cause:
8	Loss of federal funds; need for local support and funding
3	Declining enrollment
	Related Comment:
4	R & E provides "indirect" services and is more expendable than other departments; lacks priority
2	Unable to expand services to meet district needs
	R & E Operations:
7	Need for data-base management, longitudinal files, data storage and update
6	Need for better instruments, data collection techniques, testing program
5	Need to collect more and better evaluation data for decision-making; need to make results usable, to be responsive to system needs
5	Need goals and priorities, framework and structure for services, policies and procedures
3	Failure to provide timely reports, feedback; improved turn-around time on test data
2	Need to reduce costs by scoring tests locally
1	Need for greater operational efficiency
1	Need to develop item pools to test local objectives
1	R & E produces too much results
	Work Load and Resources:
7	Heavy demands; insufficient funds
5	Need to improve computer facilities
3	Need for more staff; office is understaffed

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Number of Comments	Comment
	Staff:
3	Need for staff training in data processing
2	Salaries cannot compete with industry
1	Need for qualified minorities
1	Staff is expanding - need better physical facilities